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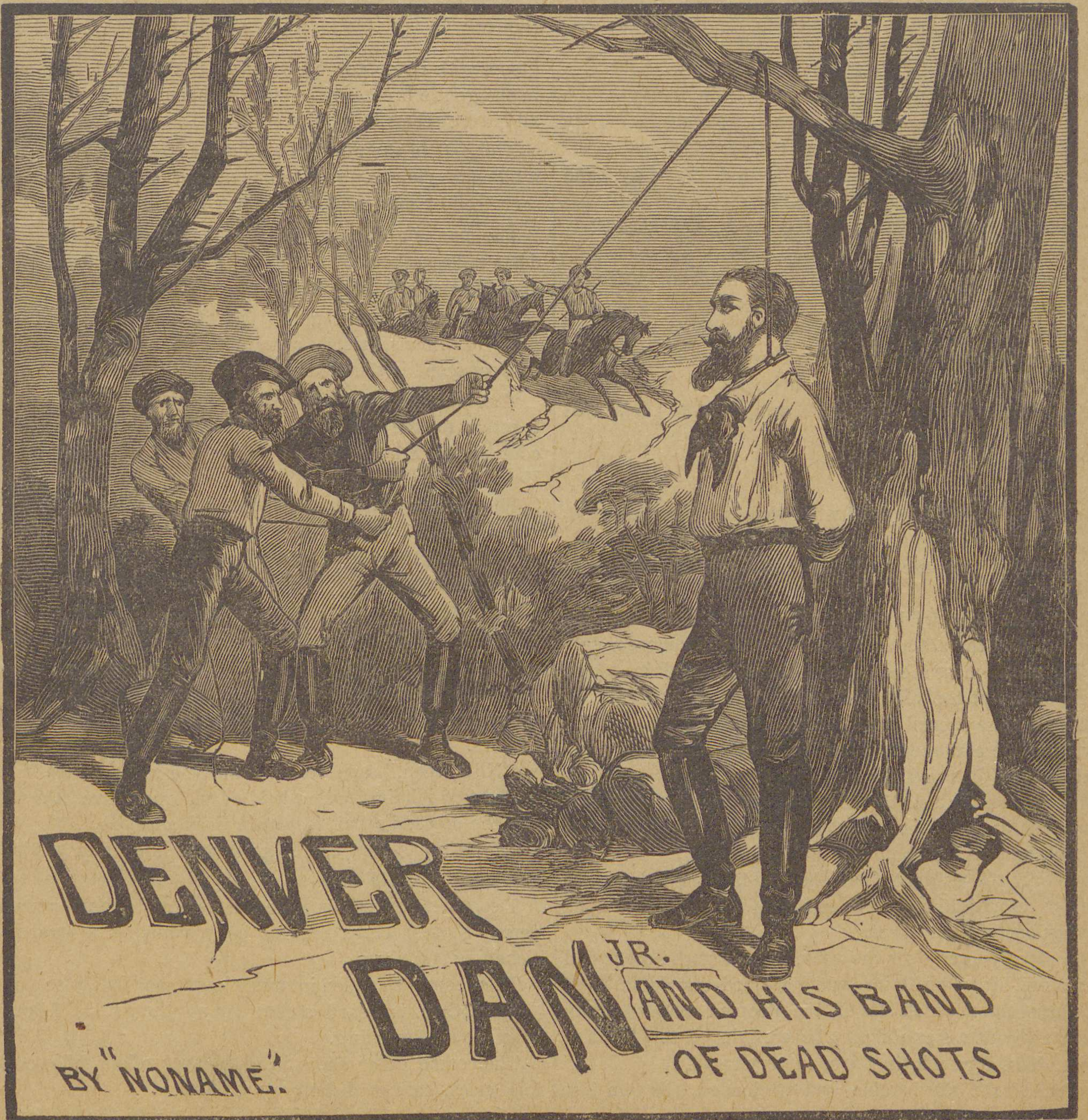
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DENVER DAN, Jr.,

AND

HIS BAND OF DEADSHOTS.

By NONAME,

Author of "The League of Fate," "Denver Dan and His Mystic Band," "Denver Dan and the Road Agents," "Denver Dan Outwitted," "Denver Dan in New York," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG DAN COMES WHERE HE IS NOT WANTED.

"Now, then, string the beggar up! No cussed deputy sheriff is going to bother us, I can tell yer!"

"Gentlemen, have mercy. I only did my duty, and that without unnecessary violence."

"Duty be blowed! Is the noose ready, Nebraska?"

"Yes."

"And you've got a good hold on the other end, Nevada and Arizona?"

"You're right we have, cap'n."

"Then, Montana, do you kick away the bar'l when I tell you, and Dakota, just you help him. Now, then, ready, and when I say 'go,' away shoots this cuss a-dancin' on nothin'."

"You're right again, governor."

"Now then——"

Before he speaks the fatal word that is to consign a fellow creature to an ignominious death, let us take a glance at the speaker and the strange scene in which he plays so pronounced a part.

The place is a wild glade in the mountains, the time morning, and the actors a band of a dozen or more rough-looking men, whose faces betoken them to be villains of the lowest order, at the very first glance.

From a huge jagged rock which projects out considerably from the cliff under which the men are grouped, depends a rope, one end of which is noosed.

This is passed about the neck of a man, evidently not a companion to the others, his hands being pinioned behind his back and his legs bound firmly together.

It is only too evident what the evil-looking fellows are going to do with him, and he can read his death sentence in every one of their faces.

The rope, passed over the neck, is held at the other end by two evil-browed villains, while a third stands in front of a barrel upon which stands the doomed man, ready to kick it away at a signal from the captain of this band of desperadoes, for such they are, in very truth.

Overhead the sky is blue and unclouded, the sun just penetrating one end of the glade, and lighting up the semi-

gloom with its golden rays, while the stunted trees sway in the gentle breeze which swept through the valley, and all nature seems to rejoice.

And yet, in the midst of all that is charming in nature, a hideous crime is about to be enacted, a human life to be sacrificed by men incapable of any noble emotions.

The man is a deputy sheriff, who, attacked by a mob of desperadoes, shot down one the number in defense of his own life and only after repeated cautions.

Going home late the next night, he was seized by a party of ruffians, friends of the man he had shot, and the present scene is the result.

The men are outlaws of the worst type, and are banded together for the express purpose of breaking the laws of the country and State, being outcasts from all parts of the Union.

They are named after the States from which they have "emigrated," being known by no other title, which scheme puts the sheriff and constable in a quandary, as a man cannot very well be indicted under the name of a State or territory, if he is known by no other alias.

The leader of the band is called Texas, and for cold-blooded villainy and criminal shrewdness certainly excels his mates to a marked degree, having been chosen for the responsible position by the unanimous vote of his colleagues.

"Now, then," says Texas, "are you ready? Go!"

The two villains having hold of the rope give it a tug, and the doomed man's feet are raised a trifle.

The fellow by the barrel gives it a kick and sends it flying along the ground.

Two other scoundrels seize the rope and the unfortunate deputy sheriff swings off, his body whirling around in a sickening manner.

Then comes a sudden interruption to the ghastly scene.

First, then, is heard a shot far up the ravine, followed by a shout of warning.

Then came other shots in rapid succession, followed by loud cries, both of defiance and alarm.

Then comes a shrill whistle, which wakes the echoes far

and wide, and sends a chill to the heart of the listening outlaws.

Then comes the tramp of hurrying steeds, followed by a ringing shout—in a boy's voice.

"Death to all outlaws!" it says. "Remember the work of Denver Dan!"

"Hurrah for the deadshots!" cry a score of boyish voices; and then, with a rush, twenty lads, mounted on fleet ponies, come rattling down the ravine.

Crack, crack, crack!

Crack, crack!

Crack!

Fast and furious come the shots, and more than one man feels a sharp pain in the shoulder or leg, while some feel the bullets whistling too close to their heads to be at all comfortable.

"Cuss the luck!" growled Texas, "it's that infernal young Dan, and his band of Deadshots. He's always coming where he ain't wanted."

At the head, of the band of new-comers rode a boy of about eighteen or nineteen, tall, lithe and handsome, dressed in a close fitting suit of blue cloth and high boots, broad red sash well filled with pistols, a slouched hat on his head, and over his shoulder a repeating rifle.

Two others were similarly, although not so richly attired, and were as fine a set of lads as one could wish, none of them being over twenty and many not more than seventeen.

The leader carried a silver whistle upon a silken cord, which hung about his sash, and upon this he blew another shrill blast and cried loudly:

"Upon them, Deadshots! Let not one of them escape!"

The shots came thick and fast, and not fancying the leaden rain which fell upon them, the outlaws hastily decamped in all directions.

One bullet strack the rope and severed it, the body of the deputy sheriff falling to the ground with a dull thud.

Another carried away the top of Arizona's hat, while a third deprived Dakota of a part of his ear and whizzed terribly near his temple.

Then came another volley as the rascals were retreating, and three of them fell dead in their tracks, proving that the title of Deadshots had not been wrongfully bestowed upon the party of boyish riders.

While one of the lads leaped from his pony and went to the assistance of the man on the ground, the others rode after the outlaws until a double blast from young Dan's whistle brought them back.

"How is our friend Harris, now?" asked young Dan of the lad at the deputy's side.

"All right. He breathes and has more color. He'll be around in a moment. He's shaken up somewhat by the fall, but is worth a dozen dead men yet."

"We were evidently not wanted by these fellows, but you can always count on Denver Dan, Jr., putting in an appearance upon such occasions."

CHAPTER II.

A MEETING OF THE UNION.

It is the evening of the day upon which the events just recorded have taken place.

In a rock-built cavern of considerable size, are gathered more than a score of villainous-looking, low-browed fellows, every one bearing some scar, or lacking some part of his anatomy, as a remembrance of some personal encounter, or bar-room brawl.

These men compose the "Union," as it is called, and some of them were present at the scene of the interrupted hanging in the morning, having been summoned hither to attend a regular meeting of the band.

Texas is in the chair, which is a rock placed upon a natural elevation in one corner of the cavern, and seated near him are Arizona, Dakota and Nebraska.

"Are all the States present?" asked Texas, when he had secured order by clapping his hands twice.

"Alabama, Missouri and California are missing," said Dakota.

"Were they in the Union?"

"They were."

"What caused them to leave?"

"Bullets, mostly. They were shot, this morning, by Denver Dan, Jr., and his band."

"Enough," said Texas, who of course knew all this before, and only went through the form of asking those questions for the sake of ceremony. "Is this on the record?"

"It is."

"Then let Denver Dan, Jr., and his band be marked as deserving the vengeance of the Union."

"They are so marked."

"Are the members of his band generally known?"

"No, but some of 'em are. There is Dan himself, Harry Everett, George Barton, Charlie Martin and Dick Travis, that we know of, but the band comprises twenty or even more."

"They are all boys?"

"Yes, there is not one who is of age."

"And these young fellows are leagued together against us, men grown, experienced men, shrewd men, and men of courage and ability?"

"They are, and if they are but boys, have the making of men in them, and have already given us men a deal of trouble."

"We'll give them as much yet, never fear. Keep a sharp watch on this young Dan, and capture him if possible. I've heard of his father, the original Denver Dan, and if his boy is anything like him he must be a terror."

"You seen what he was this mornin'," answered Nebraska. "I never knowed old Dan himself, but I've heard tell of him."

"I've seen him," spoke up Tennessee, "and I most got done for by him and his band. Me and Colorado Charlie used to run in the same gang, but when Dan began operation I concluded 'twar 'bout time to git hum ag'in."

"Lay for this young Dan and his principal men and get rid of them first. After that there'll be less trouble I fancy. We ain't going to be scared at a lot of boys."

"You bet we ain't," put in Missouri. "I'll 'low that

one on us kin take three apiece each on us and give 'em the durndest spankin' they ever had."

"What's the particular business for to-night?" asked Texas.

"To put spotters on these lads and find out who is in the gang and then go for the hull lot," answered Oregon."

"And to stop the night express afore it gets to Denver," added Wyoming. "The pay car for the road will be put on to-morrow night, and it wants to be stopped."

"Of course it does, and I appoint Montana and Wyoming to head one party and Oregon and Nebraska to head the other. I'll attend to the engineer, and Nevada will look after the conductor."

"There's some new members to be elected, Mr. President," said Arizona.

"Who are they?"

"They represent Missouri, California, Alabama, Minnesota, Idaho and Illinois. The first three have been waiting for places, and now that our late comrades is knocked under, these fellows are ready to join."

"Have these three been examined already?"

"They have; and their records are good enough to suit anyone."

"Let them be sworn. How about the others?"

"They are all right, I reckon. If they'll take the oath we can rely upon them."

"Let them advance."

The three candidates came forward and stood in front of the president, when they were instantly covered by a score of revolvers.

Then Arizona brought out a small stand covered and heavily draped with black cloth, upon which were a human skull, a brace of revolvers and a bowie-knife.

At the same time Montana and Dakota produced a large coffin, painted black within and without, which they laid in front of the stand.

"Candidates," said Texas, "kneel down and listen to my words."

The three men knelt simultaneously, the revolvers of the band being still leveled at their heads.

"Do you swear to be faithful to our band; to assist them in all things; to sacrifice father, brother, or son, should they be marked by us; to hold nothing in reverence against which the band may set its face?"

"We do!" said all three, without an instant's hesitation.

"Do you swear this by the skull, the pistol and the knife, fearing instant death and an ignominious burial if you waver in your faith?"

"We do!"

"Do you hope that storm and pestilence, murder and disgrace, ruin to both body and soul now and forever, may follow you if you prove false to your oaths?"

"We do!"

"Then you are members of our solemn order and are admitted into the Union. Had you wavered an instant, twenty bullets would have been lodged in your brains."

The men stood up, still facing the chief, who now said:

"Do you fear death?"

"We do not."

"Turn around quickly."

They did so and found the muzzles of twenty revolvers staring them in the face.

"Should I tell my men to fire, what would you do?"

"If you think us worthy of death, give the order," said Alabama.

"Let them shoot and be blowed," said Missouri. "I ain't afraid."

"You can't scare this rooster," added California. "They won't shoot."

"Fire!" said Texas suddenly, in a loud voice, having removed to one side.

There was a flash and a deafening report—the room being filled with smoke in an instant.

When it cleared away the men were still standing where they had been. Missouri with his hands folded in front of him, Alabama with them in his pockets, and California with them behind his back.

"'Tis well," said Texas. "Let their names be enrolled upon our book of records. They have stood the test, and are now in the Union."

The other three then took the oath, having been absent during this ceremony, and all six were recorded in a huge somber-bound book which Arizona produced.

The dismal paraphernalia were then removed, and two men rolled a barrel of spirits out upon the floor from some hidden recess, others producing tin cups, which they passed around, and then Texas called for a toast.

The vessels were filled and raised aloft, but before the leader could give the proposed toast a boyish voice at the back of the cavern called out:

"Confusion to this Union of outlaws and cutthroats! Drink that if you dare!"

"Who is that?" yelled Texas, hoarsely.

"Colorado, the youngest State in the Union. I am its representative, and they call me Denver Dan, Jr. Upon them, Deadshots, and spare not one of the miserable gang!"

CHAPTER III.

OUR HERO LEARNS SEVERAL THINGS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

BEFORE we explain how it happened that young Dan should be at the meeting of the Union, it may be necessary to give a few details concerning him and his band.

The readers of the story entitled "Denver Dan in New York," will recollect that the celebrated vigilante went east with his family and took up his residence, his oldest son, Dan, Jr., being then a lad of about eighteen.

The latter, it will be remembered, had much to do with the tracking of a notorious rogue, called Larry, the Wolf, who had long been one of Mr. Fleming's—Dave's father—bitterest foes.

Young Dan at that time gave promise of following in his father's steps, and it was not long before he tired of the, to him, dull life of the East, and longed to go back to Colorado.

Although Denver had become a populous city and the Vigilance Committee had long been out of existence, there was still a vast amount of law-breaking going on in the State, and young Dan longed to have a hand in putting it down, as his father had done in times before.

Harry Everett, a lad whom Mr. Fleming had befriended,

and whom the readers of the previous stories will doubtless recollect as having assisted young Dan to run Larry down, was as eager to go West again as Dan was, and at last both boys set out, losing no time until they arrived in Denver.

Here Dan found Dick Travis, a younger brother of Jack, the former lieutenant of the Mystic Band, George Barstow, a cousin of Hal's, and Joe Horton, the son of Sam Horton, one of the earliest members of Denver Dan's company.

Soon after this Charlie Martin, a brother of Ralph Martin, whom Dan had saved from a life of lawlessness while hunting down a notorious highwayman in Arizona, also appeared, and Dan had no trouble in finding many of the sons or younger brothers of members of his father's band, all of whom were ready to join him in his undertaking.

This was no less than the forming of a band, similar to that which so long had been the terror of outlaws, and making war upon the desperadoes in the unsettled portions of the State, where justice was but a name and where lawlessness reigned supreme.

Dan had that famous silver whistle which had been his father's, and which had so often summoned his faithful band to his side, and it was destined still further to send dismay to the hearts of evil-doers whenever they chanced to hear its shrill notes.

Dan was chosen the leader of the Deadshots, as the band was called, everyone of whom was an expert with rifle or pistol, and thus, mounted upon fleet ponies and uniformed as has been described, the band started out upon its travels.

While they took no pains to disguise the fact of their being leagued against outlaws, or to conceal the names of their members, they made no foolish display, and when entering a town usually put up at several different places, and never met in a body except when they had some especial business on hand.

In a few short weeks they had made themselves heard from upon several occasions, and already the outlaws in Colorado and the adjoining states and territories began to fear a visit from the young vigilante and his brave boys.

Dan had returned to the neighborhood of Denver, when he heard of the existence of a band of outlaws who infested the mountains, and he at once made up his mind to exterminate them.

The trouble with the Deputy Sheriff and his subsequent capture came to his ears, and learning from a ruffian whom the marshals had captured, where he would be likely to find the band, he and his Deadshots at once set out for the place.

What the result was, has been already told in our first chapter, and we can now go on with our hero's adventures.

When the outlaws had been disbursed, many of them secreting themselves in caves, hollow trees, and other convenient hiding places, until such time as Dan should draw off his forces, the young leader called his band to him by a signal, previously agreed upon, and the condition of affairs was looked into.

One of the outlaws whom the Deadshots had dropped,

was not dead, although badly wounded and unable to move, and to him Dan now addressed himself.

"What is your name, fellow?" he asked.

"Missouri, and I've only been in the Union a week."

"I didn't ask you where you came from, but what your name was."

"Missouri, and I swear to stick to the Union against father, brother or son, as I fear murder and pestilence, disgrace and——"

"What rubbish is this you are talking? Who are you?"

"Missouri, and I swear by the skull, the pistol and the knife to aid and assist——"

"Look here, my man," said Dan, "you haven't much time to live and I would advise you to clear your conscience of its burden of sin, instead of muttering over this gibberish. You belong to the Union?"

"Yes."

"How many members?"

"Pretty nearly every state and territory, all of the West, anyhow, and some of the East."

"Who are you?"

"Missouri."

"Have you no other name?"

"Not in the Union, nor I don't know anybody else's. They all go by states and territories."

"H'm, that prevents them from giving each other away," muttered Dan to himself. "You are a band of outlaws, I take it?"

"That's what they call us. We make our own laws."

"And break your country's. Where do you hang out?"

"I ain't going to tell the secrets of the Union. I'd never be safe if I did."

"You will soon be out of its power, and mine. You are dying."

"No, I ain't, I'm as good a man as ever I was. I'll get up in a minute and leave you."

He attempted to rise, but the effort was too much for him, and he fell, the blood gushing afresh from his wound.

"I'm afraid you're right," he gasped. "I guess I'll pass in my checks this time and no mistake. Anyhow, I've cheated the hangman and made the old woman a liar. She always said I'd come to the gallows."

"You'll die by the rope yet, if you don't tell me what I want to know," declared Dan, sternly.

"You wouldn't hang a man what's already dying, would you?" stammered the wretch, turning paler than ever.

"Yes I would, and I'll do it, too," answered Dan, seeing that the man was beginning to waver.

He of course had no intention of committing such a barbarous act as that of hanging a man already upon the verge of the grave, but the man could give him much valuable information if he chose, and he determined to play upon his pride and learn what he so much desired to know.

"Bring the rope there, Harry," he called out, "I've got a victim for you."

"For God's sake, don't do that!" gasped the man, faintly. "My name is Jack Miller, and I fled from Missouri to escape punishment for killing a man."

"We don't care to know that," said Dan. "Hurry up with that rope."

"The chief of the Union is Texas, I don't know his name, Arizona, Dakota and Montana are his biggest pals. They meet in a cave in the mountains two miles from here; follow the brook below until you come to a fall of about ten feet. Under that fall is the entrance to the cave."

"What else?"

"The Union meets there every now and again to do business, swear in new members and plan robberies. They'll have one to-night. The password is 'The Union forever' if you want to know. Now let me die in peace."

"You don't know the names of any of your comrades?"

"I know California and Alabama, but that wouldn't do you no good now, 'cause they've keeled under. Texas is the chief, I tell you, but once I overheard some one call him Porter, but whether that's his front or hind name, I couldn't tell."

"That will do," said Dan. "You have saved your neck from the gallows, and have nothing to fear from your late comrades. Dick, how is Harris getting along?"

"I'll answer that question myself," said the man, rising and coming forward. "You have saved my life, for in another moment I should have been beyond your aid. To whom am I indebted for this service?"

"To Denver Dan, Jr., and his band of Deadshots. Now, boys, let us make our plans for severing this Union that we have so strangely found."

CHAPTER IV.

OUR HERO MEETS WITH ANOTHER ADVENTURE.

THE wounded outlaw being too near death to be removed was permitted to remain where he had fallen, his wants attended to and everything done for him which could alleviate his sufferings.

There was no hope for him, his limbs having already begun to grow cold, but whatever could be done to mitigate his sufferings and smooth his path to the grave, was attended to by the sheriff, who remained in the vicinity until the man died.

Meanwhile Dan and his band had ridden off, after having sent a messenger to the nearest settlement for assistance.

When help arrived the dead men were taken away, the outlaws having failed to put in an appearance since their first surprise, being far away by this time.

Harris, who considered that he had had a most miraculous escape from death, gave full descriptions of many of the outlaws, and those Dan made a note of to use upon some future occasion.

The day had advanced considerably, when our hero and his followers rode away, and during the next eight or ten hours the band kept itself secluded, although there was great excitement in the town, and everybody was anxious to see the young hero and his brave comrades.

Dan did not care for fame of this sort, however, and he therefore kept aloof from all, his spies being out gathering information, which would be of importance in his campaign against the outlaws.

It was early evening, and Dan, Harris, Everett and

George Barstow were riding slowly along a mountain pass upon their ponies, when they suddenly heard a piercing shriek for help just ahead of them.

"There is work for us, boys," cried Dan, giving rein to his gallant little steed. "Follow me, and remember our motto."

The three spurred forward, the steel-clad hoofs of their ponies ringing sharp and clear upon the hard path, and the noble little animals seeming as much exerted as their young riders themselves.

A sudden turn in the path revealed a startling sight to the young vigilantes, and one which made their blood fairly boil with righteous indignation.

In the center of the path was a young girl, fair and beautiful, beset by three black-browed ruffians, while upon the rocks lay the body of an old man, white-haired and feeble, the blood oozing from a bad wound in his temple, evidently inflicted by the three villains surrounding the maiden.

Upon the ground were the saddlebags of two horses, one of which was held by a fourth villain at some little distance, the other having galloped away during the first of the struggle.

The men were strong, vigorous fellows, armed to the teeth, but for this Dan cared nothing, it being his habit to always fight against odds when he had the right upon his side.

Drawing his revolver, he dashed upon the villains with a loud shout, and commanded them to desist in their unholy work or take the consequences.

"Thunder and blazes! who the mischief are you?" demanded one, releasing his hold upon the young girl.

The others attempted to carry her off perforce, the man leading the horse running to their assistance, but Dan's companions quickly put a stop to this.

A shot from Harry lodged in the shoulder of the fellow holding the horse and caused him to release the animal, the latter scampering off after sprawling the man out upon the ground by a kick from his hind heels.

George brought down a second ruffian, and by this time Dan had grappled with the leader and was engaged in a hand to hand struggle with him.

The ruffian tried to dismount the brave lad, but Dan and his pony were as one and the ruffian's efforts were fruitless.

The fellow on the ground seemed to have lost all interest in the proceedings, and George and Harry had begun blazing away in such good earnest at the other two that they quickly decamped, leaving their comrade to fight it out alone with the three lads.

Dan was in no particular danger, but Harry, wishing to have the fight done with, adroitly tripped up the heels of the outlaw and laid him flat on his back.

Before he could arise the two lads had bound him securely, and then Dan turning to the young girl, said assuringly:

"Have no further fear, miss. The villains have gone, and will not return, I fancy."

"But my poor grandfather is dead," she cried in agony, having been kneeling at the old man's side for the last five minutes.

"I hope and trust that he may yet recover, although he seems badly hurt."

"No chance for it, Dan," said Harry, feeling the wounded man's pulse and putting a hand upon his pale forehead.

"Come away and tell me all about it," said Dan kindly, dismounting from his pony, which stood perfectly still, and taking the girl's hand.

"But I must not leave him to die," she cried piteously.

"My friends will do all that can be done," answered Dan quietly, leading the poor creature away from the distressing sight: "What is your name, my poor girl?"

"Nora Douglass. My grandfather and I were traveling over the mountains to Denver, when these villains attacked us."

"You had valuables in your possession?"

"Yes, and these men attempted to rob us. Poor grandfather tried to prevent them, and they set upon and beat him shamefully. They dragged me from my pony and he escaped. They then tried to carry me off, when I screamed, and then you appeared."

"Too late, I fear, to be of service," said Dan. "Examine the saddle-bags, George, and see if these villains have rifled them."

That they had was soon evident, for they had been cut across with knives and the contents taken out by the ruffians, who had, by this time, escaped beyond the chance of capture.

"Search this wretch and see if he has any of the stolen property upon him, and look out for that other fellow. He seems inclined to make off."

Harry left the old gentleman in Dan's care, and gave his attention to the fellow at a distance, while George searched the bound ruffian, but found nothing except his arms and a few dollars of his own money.

The other fellow had still less, and declared that his pals had taken all the booty while he was holding the horse.

"Who are you?" said Harry.

"Blue Bill"—his face was badly marked with gunpowder, which gave a decidedly cerulean tinge to his complexion—"and I've been fooled by these cusses. They said they'd get me into the Union, but it's all disunion in mine, for I haven't had a dollar of all the swag."

"Who is the leader of your gang?"

"Do you mean the feller on the ground, what your pals is goin' through?"

"Yes."

"He's no good, he's a bad egg. He isn't the leader of the gang at all. He thinks he is, but he ain't."

"No lying now, or I'll blow the roof of your head clean off, so that you'll think a tornado has passed this way."

"Well, he's Big Jake, that's all, to tell him from Little Jake. He comes from Missouri, and he's bad from cellar to roof."

"That'll do, Bill. Just slip your wrists into these pretty things," clapping a pair of handcuffs upon the fellow.

"Now, you come with me."

"How much money did your grandfather have, Nora?" asked Dan, when Harry came up.

"Twenty thousand dollars in gold. He was taking it to

the bank in Denver. He wouldn't go by the cars, because he said he would be sure to be robbed."

"Poor man, he might better have done so. Who will say that lawless deeds decrease with the increase of civilization?"

"But my poor grandfather!" cried the girl. "Tell me, will he live? I do not care for the money if he can be spared."

"I grieve to tell you that he is beyond our care. He is quite dead, poor girl, and must have been before we came up. Fear not, however, for we will avenge his death, and restore your money before many days have passed."

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE HISTORY—IN THE OUTLAWS' CAVERN.

"RETURN to town with these villains," said Dan, "and meet me at the foot of the pass as soon as possible. You remember the password?"

"Perfectly. And this young lady——"

"Will remain with me. I shall take her to a place of security, and go at once to the retreat of the outlaws."

Harry and George, therefore, set out upon their ponies, the bound ruffians walking in front of them, much against their will.

After they had departed, Dan took the body of Mr. Douglass and laid it away in a hidden nook of the rocks where neither wolves nor robbers could molest it, covering the pale face with his handkerchief and placing the cold hands across the breast.

Nora then told him her sad history, which he listened to with deep attention, occasionally interrupting her with an expression of sympathy and condolence.

She was utterly alone in the world, having lived with her grandfather in the West since she had been a child, and having no recollection whatever of her parents, who had died, she had been told, when she was quite an infant.

For many years her grandfather had struggled on, fighting hard against poverty and want, but attending carefully to her education and denying himself many necessities in order to provide for her comforts, daily shortening his life by his unselfish devotion to his lonely grandchild.

At last he had made a lucky find, and in a few short months had become rich beyond his wildest dreams, and was in a fair way of making as much more.

Fearing to trust his new wealth in his humble cabin in the mountains, he had set off for Denver with his granddaughter, intending to place his money in the bank, and put Nora to school while he increased his wealth, having already spoken for a lot of improved machinery and a gang of laborers.

It was upon this journey, and when nearly at his destination, that he had been attacked by this party of bandits, his wealth taken from him, his life sacrificed, and the honor of his beloved grandchild put in peril.

Dan had not arrived altogether too late, but there was still much to be done before the poor girl's property could be restored to her, and although our hero was not lacking in courage, he foresaw many difficulties in the way.

It would be hard to get upon the track of the scoundrels who had made away with the gold, but Dan was well acquainted with the country and knew most of the hid-

ing places of the villains thereabouts; relying upon this knowledge and his own abilities to run the rascals down and recover the stolen money.

Not far from the present place there was a cave, snug and warm, with heavy doors well concealed from sight, where he had often spent his days and nights, and thither he intended taking his charge until such time as he could conduct her to the city and place her with those who would look after her interests.

Leaving the body of her poor father secure from molestation, he placed Nora upon the saddle before him, and giving his beloved animal free rein, scampered off towards his mountain retreat.

Half an hour sufficed to reach the place, but by this time night had already fallen, and the cold wind swept through the pass, fairly chilling one's blood.

It did not take long to start a fire and make his visitor comfortable, there being a supply of provisions in the cave, owing to his having lately occupied it, and having finished his own meal, and seeing that Nora was furnished with everything she required, he bade her good evening and rode off to keep his appointment.

The night was dark, but Dan knew his way, and he feared nothing, having been used to scenes of adventure since a child, and inheriting all his father's bravery and fearlessness.

When he reached the scene of the morning's adventures, the night was well advanced, and he hastened so as not to be too late to the meeting, which he would not have missed attending for a good deal.

At a few rods distant from the waterfall, where he knew the sentry would be posted, he secured his steed, and gave utterance to a loud whistle.

It was not answered, and after listening in silence for a few moments, he crept stealthily forward until he came in sight of the sentinel passing to and fro upon the rocks just at the top of the fall.

Then he arose and walked boldly forward, presenting himself in full view of the sentinel.

"Who goes there?" said the man, hoarsely.

"A member of the Union."

"Advance, member of the Union, and give the password."

Dan stepped forward and whispered:

"'The Union forever.' Colorado is glad to see you vigilant."

"Colorado!" repeated the man, in astonishment. "Colorado hasn't been admitted into the Union. There is some mistake here."

"Oh, no, there isn't," said Dan, suddenly clapping a revolver to the fellow's ear. "Colorado and I are old friends, and we're going into the Union to-night with something that will surprise the gentlemen there assembled."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded the man. "Is this some new joke you fellows are playing on me?"

"Utter another word and you're a dead man. Hold up your hands."

The fellow obeyed, and at that moment there came a peculiar call from the bushes close by.

"Is that you, Harry?" asked Dan, in a hurried whisper, but never letting his eyes off the sentinel.

"Yes," replied the boy, coming from his place of concealment.

"Is there any one with you?"

"George and Dick, and the others are not far away. We have just come up."

"Then look after this fellow while I make my way inside. Do you follow one after the other in order not to cause an alarm, and when I give the word, act."

"But this fellow?"

"Bind and gag him, and then stow him away somewhere so that he won't give us any trouble. Quickly, for I hear a noise inside."

The two boys disposed of the man, Dan covering him with his revolver, and preventing him from making any disturbance, after which our hero made his way down the stone steps to the base of the fall.

Plunging headlong through the sheet of water, he found himself in a narrow arched passage, which seemed to lead to a cavern beyond.

Pressing forward, he presently came out into a large circular opening, lighted by pine knots and swinging lamps, and here were assembled the outlaws in solemn conclave.

His appearance was not especially noticed, nor was that of Harry and George, who soon followed, the men being interested in what was going on.

By twos and threes the Deadshots slipped into the cavern and ranged themselves in various parts of it, taking care, however, to form a continuous line, of which Dan was the central point.

Then when Texas was about to propose a toast, Dan gave utterance to those startling words which had so infuriated the leader, and followed up his further utterances by shouting:

"Now then, Deadshots! Let us put an end to this Union of rascality and villainy. Upon 'em, and let not a man escape!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS—A NEW SURPRISE.

"YOUNG DAN again, by the powers of darkness!" yelled Texas. "Cut down the young fiend, my men. Thus perish all enemies of the Union!"

"Not so fast, my friend," cried Dan, rallying his brave boys around him. "Now, Deadshots, do your duty!"

Crack! rang the rifles of the boys, and with an oath the leader of the outlaws fell to the floor.

"Betrayed!" he yelled, rising again to his feet, stunned but not badly hurt. "Shoot 'em down, members of the Union."

Crack, crack!

Shot answered shot, and the whole place was in confusion in an instant.

The outlaw saw at once that there was not one determined boy alone to deal with, but twenty, every one of them as brave and resolute as the young leader.

The boys were sworn, he knew, to exterminate all such men as he and his gang, and having dared to enter the

place, would not leave it until they had made their power felt.

He determined to resort to stratagem, therefore, to get himself and men out of the scrape into which they had been drawn, and then to punish the rash invaders for their temerity in entering his den of thieves.

Crash!

Every light suddenly went out, the villain having severed by a shot the rope which connected with the whole, and down they all came, leaving the place in total darkness.

"Let the Union disband," he then cried, and a hurrying of feet was heard in all directions.

In an instant twenty dark lanterns flashed their powerful light through the place, and Dan and his friends saw a number of stragglers just disappearing, seemingly through the solid walls.

Dan and his comrades were all provided with dark lanterns already lighted, and in an instant after the cavern lights had been extinguished, these shed their gleaming rays upon the scene.

A few shots sounded as the last of the outlaws disappeared, but if any were wounded they were quickly pulled into a place of concealment by their comrades, and, save Dan and the Deadshots, not a soul was to be seen in the cavern.

"Sold!" ejaculated Dan, in disgust. "Boys, we may as well leave this place; we'll rout out these rats yet!"

They then hastily decamped, fearing that the outlaws might yet make a flank movement upon them and get even with them for their interference.

Hurrying along the passage, and plunging through the veil of water, they made their way quickly to the top of a bank, which they had no sooner reached, when their ears were assailed by a series of harsh cries.

"Here they are!" shouted Dan. "Now, then, make short work of the miscreants!"

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Shot after shot rang out upon the stillness, and by the light of the lanterns more than one outlaw was seen to fall, uttering his death shriek.

"Charge them!" yelled Dan, and the Deadshots plunged into the thicket in full cry, the shots raining thick and fast upon the outlaws.

They returned a desultory fire for a few moments, but the rush of the young vigilantes was so impetuous as not to be withstood, and they soon broke and sought cover wherever they could find it.

Dan then blew a call upon his whistle, and the boys returned, and mounting their ponies rode away at a furious pace, their hoofs clattering loudly upon the rocky road.

When they had reached the shadow of the overhanging rock, where the deputy sheriff had so nearly ended his life a dozen hours before Dan reined in his steed and said:

"Go up to the town, boys, and get all the news you can. I will meet you here in the morning. Harry, I want you to come with me."

The main body of the party galloped off, and then Dan

told his friend what he had learned concerning Nora, and added:

"Let us go to her and reassure her, and in the morning we will accompany her to Denver."

"We don't want to forget that proposed robbery of the pay-car, Dan."

"I don't propose to forget it, old fellow. We have plenty of time to attend to that, however. Now, let's be off."

They galloped on, saying but little during the journey, partly because both were busy with their thoughts.

At last Harry said, suddenly, as if some idea had just struck him:

"I say, Dan?"

"Say it then, old fellow."

"How are you going to get that money back?"

"Hunt for it!"

"Do you suppose the thieves belong to the Union?"

"Very likely."

"Don't you think you were rather previous in making this raid on them to-night then, when you might have learned a great many of their secrets by keeping quiet?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you might have."

"What would you have done in my place?"

Harry laughed and then said, good-naturedly:

"The same as you did, Dan. 'Tis all very well to say what might have been after the thing is over, but our second thoughts never come first."

"And after all, Harry, we didn't know that they had another outlet to their hole."

"It didn't look like it, to be sure."

"Never mind, we'll ferret them out yet, and then we may discover where this money is."

"I don't believe that Big Jake was at the head of that affair at all. I believe your man told the truth there."

"Perhaps; and if so, it simplifies matters, for once we break up the Union, we shall get at the bottom of all these mysteries."

"Do you think there is any at the bottom of this affair of the money?"

"Yes. How did these fellows know he had it? I must pump Jake and find out more about it. Perhaps Nora herself can give me a clew."

"How much further have we to go? This pace is shaking me all up."

"We're almost there. The next turning will see us at the end of our jaunt."

When they reached the cave Dan dismounted, and Harry was about to follow suit when he suddenly said in a hoarse whisper:

"Don't you see that fellow making off yonder, just around the corner of the ledge? I'll warrant he's here for no good purpose."

Dan flashed the light of his lantern towards the place indicated, but nothing was seen, nor when the lad examined the path could he find any one or discover any traces of visitors.

"Guess you must have mistaken a shadow for a man," he said upon his return. "There was no one about."

Then he led the ponies to safe retreat, after which he left them and made his way to his cave.

Here a new surprise awaited him, for when he pushed the door open the place was empty!

CHAPTER VII.

VISITORS TO THE CAVE.

It was too true, the cave was empty, and Nora Douglass spirited away.

Both Dan and Harry were surprised beyond measure at the discovery, our hero because he did not know that anybody besides himself possessed his secret, and Harry because he knew it to be something uncommon for his chum to be outwitted in any instance.

"She can't have gone out by herself, can she?" asked Harry.

"No, indeed, for I cautioned her particularly against doing so, or even to open the door."

"Well, it's mighty puzzling. Do you suppose she has really gone away of her own accord?"

"To be sure not, for there are the marks of a violent struggle."

"Where? I don't see any."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Why, there are lots of them."

"Show me some."

"In the first place, things are not as I left them."

"Womanly curiosity, Dan. She has been turning things around and upside down in your absence, for the want of something better to do."

"No, no, it is not that. There has been a struggle here, and she has been carried off against her will."

"She may have got tired of the place and gone off by herself, leaving things as you see them in order to mislead you."

"Nonsense, Harry. She wouldn't go away in the first place. Where would she go?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"No more would she. Do you see that buffalo robe spread down yonder?"

"Yes."

"Do you see anything peculiar about it?"

"It's rumpled a bit, that's all."

"Don't you see a well-defined footprint upon this edge, and another in the center?"

"No."

"They are there all the same. Come here and I'll show you."

Dan then pointed out upon the skin a pair of well-defined footprints, like those which a man of good stature and weight would be likely to make.

"The fellow was white and wore heavy boots," said Dan.

"How do you know he was white?"

"He couldn't have been an Indian, for they don't wear boots, and besides these footprints turn the toes out, which an Indian never does."

"Couldn't he have been a negro?" asked Harry, with a shy laugh.

"Yes, but I don't think he was, all the same, for here is a knife with blood upon it," continued Dan, stooping in a corner near the fire.

"Do you know the difference between the blood of a white man and a darkey?"

"No, but the man's hand has been cut, and small pieces of skin have adhered to the blade. These are hard, thick, and white. Our young lady has cut the villain in the hand, and he has wrenched the knife from her and thrown it down here."

"How do you know?"

"Because there is blood on the handle and the imprints show the outlines of fingers."

"By George, Dan, you're a regular artist."

"Oh, no, I merely observe things which one can't help seeing. This thing happened only ten minutes before we came in, and the traces are still fresh."

"How can you tell when it happened, if you weren't here?"

"Do you see that little clock on the floor?" he asked, picking up a small, cheap time-piece and putting it upon a little ledge in the rock, which served as a shelf.

"Yes."

"Well, it has stopped, and is now twenty minutes slower than my time, and we have been here about ten minutes."

"Then the villain cannot have gone very far in that time."

"I don't believe he has gone a great distance, myself."

"Then suppose we hunt for him. There was only one, you say?"

"That's all. There's no use in hunting for him though."

"You don't intend to let him escape, I hope?"

"No."

"Then why not look for him?"

"Because he will come back."

"How do you know that?"

"He will think that we have gone out to look for him, and will return to rifle the place, as there are many things here which will be of value to him. He will probably bring a friend or so with him."

"And you are going to wait?"

"Yes."

"And pop 'em over when they come in?"

"Exactly."

"You've got a cool head, Dan."

"So have you, and you're just the right fellow to have in here with me. Now let us stow ourselves away in the corner, behind this pile of skins, and lay for the villains."

"I'm agreeable."

The two boys accordingly hid themselves and waited patiently for the expected visitors, intending to give them a warm reception upon their arrival.

They waited nearly an hour, and then suddenly heard voices speaking in low, cautious tones, just outside the entrance, the door being left slightly ajar.

It was pushed open stealthily, and three men entered, big, sturdy, evil-looking fellows, armed with shot-guns and bowie-knives.

"The young feller has sloped, Jim," said one, "gone to look for the trail, I reckon, and we can go through the place at our leisure."

"If we had this den to ourselves, we could hide the swag here, and let the Union go to blazes."

"What swag can they mean?" thought Dan, eager to hear more.

"Yes," replied the second man, evidently the one called Jim. "That gold belongs to us, and not the Union. They didn't help us at all. It was a private snap of our own."

"And now the old man is dead and the gal out of the way," said the third, "I comes in for all his property."

"His claim is wuth a million, if it's wuth a cent," said Jim.

"And I'm ready to do the squar thing by you and Ned, for helpin' me in this business. Sam Douglass ain't no slouch, I kin tell yer."

"There was something more at the bottom of this, after all," thought Dan. "I suspected that there must be."

"And you're the only heir, now that the gal don't show up?" said Ned, inquiringly.

"Yaas. The gal's a niece of mine. Me and the old man never did hitch, and when I saw him makin' his pile, I allowed that I would go for it."

"Oh, you villain!" thought young Dan.

"But what are ye goin' to do with her?" inquired Jim.

"Put her outen the way, and have her body found in the mountains. The noise of this here robbery will be heard in Denver, and she'll be supposed to have been killed by the same gang as robbed her grandad. Then I steps in, proves my claim, and corrals the chink."

"Ye're forgettin' one important pint," said Ned.

"What's that?"

"Young Denver Dan. He'll give it all away."

"No, he won't, for we'll lay for him here and let daylight clear through his cussed young carcass."

"Gentlemen!" cried Dan, suddenly rising, "I am Denver Dan, Jr., at your service. You can begin putting your plans in practice just as soon as you think necessary!"

CHAPTER VIII.

YOUNG DAN GIVES HIS VISITORS A SURPRISE PARTY.

AT the sound of our hero's voice the three ruffians started back in surprise, and leveled their shot-guns.

"Drop those clumsy weapons," commanded Dan, "and shut the door."

The men seemed disinclined to obey, but the sight of Dan's repeating rifle leveled at them made them think better of it.

Harry, too, now stood beside his friend, and the determined appearance of the two young fellows was too much for the nerves of the miscreants.

"Drop your weapons!" cried Dan. "I'll give you just five seconds to do it. One—two—three——"

Down went the weapons on the stone floor with a clatter, guns and knives pitched together in a heap.

"Now take off your coats," commanded Dan again. "Be quick about it. One—two——"

Off came those coats as quick as lightning, and in an instant they were thrown upon the pile of arms.

"Now your boots!"

"I say, boss, ye're not goin' to strip us clean down to the buff, are ye?" asked Douglass, with a whine.

"No words about it, but do as I tell you. Spot that fellow, Harry, and if he don't hurry, put a bullet in him. Now then! One—two—three——"

Off came the boots, and as Sam Douglass threw his own on the floor, a bowie-knife dropped out of one of them.

"Ha, ha! I thought you would be up to some such game as that," said Dan with a laugh. "Have any of you fellows got anything else in the shape of weapons about you? Speak quick, or I'll riddle you like a sieve."

"I've got a pop," said Jim, producing a small pistol from a concealed pocket.

"Throw it down. Anything else?"

"No."

"Have you, Sam?"

"Nixey."

"And you, Sam Douglass?"

"I ain't got nothin', 'cept what ye see."

"Step out half a dozen paces."

"What's that fur?"

"Never you mind. Step out, I tell you, and if I have to repeat any more of my orders it will be the worse for you."

Sam stepped out six paces as directed.

"Now strip clean down to your socks and underclothes! Right down to the skin, I tell you. You're not to be trusted as far as I can throw a bull by the tail."

"But I say, boss," said Sam, hesitating.

Crack!

A bullet flew so close to the top of Sam's head that it grazed his scalp and cut away the hair as neatly as a scissors could have done.

"Now then," said Dan, determinedly, "you see what I can do. I am no more a slouch than you are yourself, so mind what I say to you. Off with waistcoat and trousers."

Off they came in less time than it takes to tell it, and Sam Douglass stood in his shirt, drawers, and socks.

"Now your shirt, and no nonsense about it."

The shirt followed the rest, and, as it came off, a wide canvas belt was exposed to view, bound about the man's waist.

"Take off that belt and give it to me."

The wretch knew it was useless to disobey, and, unbuckling the belt, he came and handed it to Dan, who quickly examined it, Harry watching the other two ruffians closely, and keeping them covered with his unerring weapon.

In the belt were a hundred dollars in money and a paper folded lengthwise, which Dan quickly opened.

"Why, you infernal villain," he said, in his surprise, "this is your own father's will, leaving everything he does or may possess to his granddaughter Nora."

"Tain't no good," said Sam, in a dogged manner.

"That's a lie, and you know it, or you wouldn't have kept it so carefully. It is duly signed and sealed, and is a perfectly valid document."

"Maybe it is, but if the gal don't turn up, it ain't no good to her, is it?"

"We'll see about that. Now strip down to your skin."

There was no hesitation this time, and in a moment the miserable wretch stood before them as naked as the day he was born.

"Now throw all your clothes on the fire. After that you can go."

"What! Turn me out naked in the cold? This ain't summer time."

"Where have you hidden the girl, your niece?"

"None of your business."

"Here, you, Ned, take that fellow's coat, trousers and vest and throw them on the fire."

"Hold up!" cried Sam, "there's a box of cartridges in the vest, an' it'll go off."

"Clean out the pockets."

Ned did so, and at a signal from Dan threw the things on the fire, where they instantly burst into flames.

"Now the boots," and in an instant these, too, followed.

"Now the under-clothes," and these were quickly added to the blazing pile.

"Now open the door and kick that fellow out," said Dan to Ned.

The order was literally obeyed, and stark-naked, poor Sam went flying out into the cold and biting air, Ned fastening the door upon him.

"Now, if you fellows know where the girl and the stolen money are hid, you'd better tell," said Dan, "or I'll give you just such another fixing as I gave Sam. You don't often have such a surprise party when you call on your neighbors, do you?"

"You've got us dead to rights, pard, and if you'll let up on us I'll show you where the place is."

"Do you belong to the Union?"

"Yes. I'm Georgia, and Ned, he's Minnesota. Heard that you cleaned out some of the fellers to-night. I was on this job, and wasn't there."

"I see you were. You've got a bad cut in the hand. That's your knife in the corner there with the blood on it, I suppose?"

"Yes; the gal grabbed it out'n my belt and cut me in the hand. I pulled it away from her and chucked it on the floor."

"And Sam Douglass hired you to do this?"

"Yes. We was in 'tother racket, too, and I follered ye and found whar ye tuck the gal. Arter ye went away I waited a bit and then give the signal you'd agreed on, and she let me in."

"She was a plucky one, and fought like the old Nick; but I stopped her noise with a hankercher and took her off. She's down to the Old Maids' Gulch, a lonely place about a mile from here."

"Does Sam know the place?"

"Yes; and he's more'n likely to go down thar and vent his spite on the poor critter."

"Harry, tie this other fellow up and leave him inside, while you stand guard on the outside. Jim and I are going down to the Old Maid's Gulch. I want to borrow your pony."

"All right, Dan; you can have him; you know where to find him."

Ned was quickly bound, and then the two boys went outside, Jim accompanying them.

Dan found his own pony quick enough, but when he went to fetch Harry's the animal was missing!

"Sam has taken it," cried Dan. "Never mind, I know where Old Maid's Gulch is, and I'll overhaul this ruffian."

"And me?" said Jim.

"You wait till I come back, and don't try to fool with my chum there, for he's as good a shot as I am."

"You bet I won't. I've seen what you kin do, and if he's anything like you, I don't want to stand in front of him when he pulls the trigger of that 'ere shootin'-iron of his."

"Keep a good watch on him, Harry, and don't neglect to shoot if he forgets himself," said Dan.

Then vaulting into the saddle, our hero went thundering down the path at a frightful speed, getting as much out of the little animal as even the most expert Indian could, for he was upon an errand of life and death, and could brook no delay.

CHAPTER IX.

A WILD RIDE—NORA AND HER MONEY BOTH RECOVERED.

DOWN the rocky path sped our hero with the very swiftness of the wind, his gallant steed's hoofs ringing out a merry tune upon the flinty road as he hurried on.

It was indeed a matter of life and death, and Dan made the most of every moment.

His brave little pony seemed to know that something extra was required of him, and he galloped as he never galloped before, the sparks flying back as his steel-shod hoofs rang on the rocks, and his breath coming quick and short.

Every now and then he would give a snort of pleasure as his young rider spoke caressingly to him, and at every fresh word he seemed to increase his speed.

On and on like the wind dashed steed and rider, rock, bank and bush flying by, and the wind whistling keen and crisp around Dan's curling hair and across his handsome face, now tossing the pony's mane, and now lifting the gold tassels upon Dan's slouched hat.

On and on, past mountains, torrents swollen with recent floods, along the brink of precipices, and through narrow passes where the rocks towered high above their heads, and there was not more than an inch to spare on either side.

Now the journey is nearly ended, and Dan, bending forward over his pony's neck, listens attentively for a sound that he would give the world to hear.

He hears it, the sound of hoofs ahead of him, and he urges on his plucky little steed faster than ever.

Then, as the moon suddenly emerges from a bank of clouds, illumining the path and showing a dangerous precipice close to his side, he sees a strange figure mounted upon a pony and speeding like wildfire along the path.

Suddenly the pony ahead of him stumbles, and the rider is thrown over his head and hurled down the abyss, striking far below with a sickening thud.

The pony does not fall, but presently recovers himself, dashing on without his rider.

Dan gives a peculiar call upon his whistle, and the intelligent animal stops within his own length, and stands as rigid as though carved from stone.

Dan slackens his pace, and ambling slowly up to where the knowing creature stands, pats him upon his neck, and riding past, calls upon him to follow.

They are soon at the entrance of Old Maids' Gulch, and Dan dismounts, leaving the two animals standing at the side of the path.

He descends the ravine, and presently comes to a small shanty almost hidden from sight by the rocks and bushes.

He pushes open the door with one shove of his strong shoulders and enters a small room dimly lighted by a hanging lantern.

A figure springs up from a low couch by the window and cries:

"So you have returned, have you, villain? If Denver Dan, Jr., discovers your hiding-place, as he surely will, you will dearly repent having dragged me away to this horrible place."

Dan at once recognized the voice as that of Nora Douglass, and said with a merry laugh:

"Thank you, Miss Nora, for standing up for me so well."

"Dan!" she cried, joyfully, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him.

"I have come to take you back to my hut," he said, "and to-morrow I will see you safe in Denver. I have made an important discovery since I last saw you."

He then related how he had discovered Sam's plot, Nora having heard of her uncle, though she had not seen him in years.

"But will he not still try to get this property away from me?" she asked.

"He will never trouble you more," said Dan, gravely.

"Did you kill him?" she inquired in hushed tones.

"No," and Dan briefly related what had befallen the wretch.

"Now let us look for this gold," he said, "for I suspect it is hidden here."

Searching around the room, he presently discovered a trap-door under the bed, and raising this beheld a narrow ladder leading below to a sort of cellar or excavation in the rocks.

Taking the lantern in one hand and holding a revolver in the other for fear that there might be enemies below, Dan descended the ladder carefully, keeping a sharp lookout for dangers of all kinds.

He heard a savage growl, and as he turned to see whence it came, a savage dog leaped towards him.

Crack!

He sent a bullet through the brute's brain, and then springing to the bottom looked around him.

Over in one corner there was small wooden chest, damp with moisture, and he at once came to the conclusion that here was what he sought.

The chest was locked, but a shot from his revolver soon broke the fastenings, and he threw up the lid and gazed upon the contents.

Under a portion of an old horse blanket were several packages, and upon one of these was marked the name—

"DOUGLASS."

It was the poor old man's gold, and the other packages contained money in various sums, though to whom it belonged no one could tell.

The bag was tolerably heavy, but Dan was strong, and raising it upon his shoulders our hero took it to the floor above and then closed the trap.

"I've recovered your money, and more besides," said

Dan, "and we cannot find an owner for it; we can give it to the poor, for I would not touch a dollar of it."

"Are you going to take it away?"

"Yes; so if you are ready we will mount and return to the cave. There is a pony outside that you can use."

When the sun was just beginning to gild the tops of the mountains, Dan and his companion rode up to the cave, where they found Harry still on guard, overjoyed to see his old friends once more.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNION IS DISSOLVED—CONCLUSION.

"WILL you two fellows promise to leave this part of the country and never show up again if I let you go?"

"Bet yer sweet life, pard. You've made it altogether too hot here for fellers of our sort, and there ain't no fun at all in stayin' round any longer."

"I'll travel for Texas so fast that ye can't see my legs."

"All right, but remember if you ever come back this way again, if it's twenty years from now, you'll be shot on sight."

"I believe ye, pard, and when ye see my heels flyin' down that road ye've seen the last of me. I mean business, and I'll stick to what I say."

The above conversation was held between Dan and his two captives early in the evening of the same day upon which he returned with Nora and the treasure.

The two rascals had been kept in confinement all day, George Barstow and Charlie Martin relieving Harry in the duties of sentinel, the latter greatly needing rest.

Dan had sent one of the boys to Denver on the cars. Nora and her own money being in his charge, the other being retained in the cave.

This matter having been disposed of, Dan had summoned his band of Deadshots, his next move being the total dissolution of the Union, as he was determined to break up this and all similar gangs wherever they appeared.

The two rogues had given him considerable information concerning the organization, upon promise of protection in case their comrades should ever discover their treachery.

"Clear out of the country as fast as you can," said Dan, "and you'll be safe, but if you stay here twenty-four hours you'll be strung up to the first tree."

There was no mistaking the meaning of the young man's words, and the men promised faithfully to go away and never return, provided they were set free.

Dan then had them conducted five or six miles from the place, and then, sitting upon his pony, with a cocked revolver in his hand, he said:

"Now, away with you, and if I ever see you again I'll shoot you as sure as I live."

The men needed no second warning, and bolted off as though the devil himself were at their heels, being soon lost to sight, and it was safe enough to say that they would never turn up in that quarter again as long as they lived.

"Now," said Dan, when the two villains had disappeared, "it is barely possible that this band of ruffians may attempt to carry out their plot of robbing the train, although the officials have been warned, and the pay-car detained until morning.

"Hadn't we better go to their cave?" asked Harry.

"No, but to their rendezvous, and there lie in wait for them. If they do not put in an appearance, we must hunt for them elsewhere."

They rode away in a body, therefore, and at the end of an hour reached the place where the intended attack was to be made.

Here they secreted themselves, and waited until nearly midnight, when the whistle of the approaching train was heard.

"They have given up the idea," whispered Harry, "and we shall have waited for nothing."

"Sh! there comes some one now, two men, and one has a red lantern."

The two men approached, and when they arrived directly opposite to where Dan lay concealed, one of them said:

"When she comes, Arizona, swing your red light, and she'll stop. Then when the engineer asks you what the matter is, shoot him dead."

"All hunk; and then?"

"That'll be the signal for the rest of us. I'll go for the car with one part, and Nevada will look after the conductor and brakemen with the other. The passengers won't give us any trouble, 'cause they'll be asleep."

"Yer right. Hark! She can't be far away, now, for there's the whistle."

"Five minutes will settle the business. Now I'm off. I've got the men posted behind that old shed at the further end of the gap, and I'll fetch 'em up as soon as I hear you shoot."

With that he went away, leaving his villainous companion alone with the red light in his hand.

One, two, three minutes passed, and then the headlight of the approaching train could be seen flashing in the darkness.

The villain in waiting began to swing his lantern, when suddenly there was a shrill whistle which resounded from one end of the gap to the other.

"Now then, Deadshots, do your duty!"

So shouted Dan, and in an instant every single one of them was in the saddle.

The man with the lantern was thrown down, and in his fright he discharged his revolver, thus giving the signal agreed upon.

"Charge!" yelled Dan, and away dashed the daring band as the men of the Union began to swarm up.

"Fire!" came the next command.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Rifle and revolver blazed away at a fearful pace, and mingling with the din came the roar and rush of the train, the shriek of the engine, and the hoarse shouts of the baffled ruffians.

Many of them, in the bustle and confusion, got upon the track, and were crushed under foot by the iron horse, who, reckless of human life, came tearing down the rails, puffing and snorting and sending forth a cloud of smoke and sparks.

Crack! crack! crack!

"Give it to 'em, Deadshots! Don't spare one of the villains!"

The gallant boys charged right and left, blazing away whenever they saw one of the villains, and in the midst of the *melee* the train swept by with a shriek.

The outlaws, those that still remained alive, broke and fled in all directions, being utterly demoralized, defeated and disheartened.

The Union was dissolved then and for all time!

The band was never got together again, and the cave where it had met was left vacant and empty, the treasure it contained being removed by the authorities and, as far as possible, returned to the original owners.

Nora Douglass came into a handsome property, her father's will being proved without difficulty, and the claim sold to great advantage, so that she is now one of the richest women in the State, never forgetting to hold our hero in kind remembrance, knowing that she owes her good fortune to DENVER DAN, JR., AND HIS BAND OF DEADSHOTS.

[THE END.]

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